

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 1988

## Our Theory: He's the Ad's Creator, And He's Been Given the Day Off

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NEW YORK—There's a hot new debate about cigarettes, and it doesn't have anything to do with anti-smoking laws or the health hazards of tobacco.

Madison Avenue is all abuzz about a quirky Benson & Hedges cigarette ad that shows a young man—clad only in his pajama bottom—interrupting a festive brunch. The curly-haired fellow stands at one end of a stylish dining room in which five well-dressed women and an older man, having finished eating, are relaxing over wine and cigarettes. In an adjacent smaller picture, the young man (with the older man's hand on his arm) exchanges a friendly pat with one of the women.

What goes on here?

### Show and Tell

Interpretations range from the silly to the salacious. Barbara Lippert, Ad Week magazine's advertising critic, got so many calls and letters about the topless man that he became the subject of her column this week. One of her theories: "He's had particularly successful abdominal liposuction and is proudly showing the results."

Reviewing the feedback so far, executives at Wells, Rich, Greene, the ad agency for Benson & Hedges, say some people figure the guy lives next door and just straggled in, looking a bit lost. Others think he's

getting up late after having spent a pleasant but presumably exhausting night with some, or perhaps all, of the women.

Advertising Age magazine is so caught up in the intrigue that it's asking its readers to send in their explanations.

Ad executives are surprised—and a little envious—about the commotion. "It's attracting attention, and that's the hardest thing for advertising to do today," says Marvin Honig, chairman of William Esty.

Stephen Novick, an executive vice president at Grey Advertising, is amused by the response. "In Europe, I can't imagine people lifting an eyebrow over it," he says. "But this just shows how provincial and puritanical Americans are."

### Some Kind of Natural

So what is the "official" interpretation? "There really is no script for our Benson & Hedges ads," says Kenneth Olshan, chairman of Wells Rich. "We just told the actors to do what they would naturally do at a brunch. We're trying to avoid clichés."

But Philip Morris Cos., the cigarette's maker, has a more complete—if rather tame—scenario. "It could be a woman's wine-tasting club having brunch," says Renee Simons, brand manager for Benson & Hedges. "Her father drops in first. Then her husband, who has slept in, walks into the room." And the sexual innuendo? "We never intended anything like that."

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